



HMUN 2025

Fighting the oppression of minorities due to cultural difference

ASEAN

Elvan Suna Özsoy

Deputy President



Forum: Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Issue: Fighting the oppression of minorities due to cultural difference

Name: Elvan Suna Özsoy

Position: Deputy Chair

Introduction

Throughout centuries, people from different cultures, races, and religions have cohabited in the same areas. In almost all of these cases, the minorities have been oppressed by the majority that they live with. "Oppression" refers to a combination of prejudice and institutional power that creates a system that regularly and severely discriminates against some groups and benefits other groups, and it shows itself in the form of insults, physical violence, mental abuse, separation of the minorities from the majority, and many others.

Who are minorities? There are seven most visible minority groups: Ethnic and racial minorities, national minorities, involuntary minorities, voluntary minorities, gender and sexuality minorities, disabled minorities, and religious minorities.

- Ethnic and racial minorities are usually defined as people of color or non-white people and are discriminated against because of their race. Some of the major cases were Apartheid (the legal system for segregation in South Africa from 1948 until 1994) and the studies of eugenics in Nazi Germany.
- National minorities are different from racial minorities because they have a special connection to the place or culture their nationality is linked to. For example, if a Mexican has immigrant grandparents and while the family has been living in the USA, though they visit Mexico every year and celebrate Mexican holidays, they are a national minority.
- Involuntary minorities are the people who were brought up and often trapped in a new society involuntarily. Some examples are native Americans and native Hawaiians who had to adapt to the USA's culture in the places where they already lived. This can also be caused by a natural disaster hitting where they live and them becoming stripped of their shelter, starting to live in precarity, and having to rely on others.
- Voluntary minorities are usually immigrants who believe that they will find more opportunities to put their talents and education to use. For example, study abroad students. They willingly brought themselves into a new culture and society, but that

should never be a reason to belittle them or justify one's discrimination against them.

- Gender and sexuality minorities include people within the LGBTQ+ community and also many other gender variant people who do not identify as LGBTQ+, such as intersex people. The LGBTQ+ community, however, usually disliked the term "gender and sexuality minority" as it refers to a clinical perspective and not to identity.
- Disabled minorities consist of people who have a physical and/or mental disability. They suffer disadvantages within technologies and social institutions as most of them are made for the use of the non-disabled population. Even places as simple as metro stations sometimes don't have the necessary catering for this minority group.
- Religious minorities vary from country to country, being the groups with different faiths than the majority of the population. While most Western countries' citizens have the freedom of not establishing their religion or not having a faith, others, such as Egypt, require citizens to state their religion, and the only options are Muslim, Christian, and Jewish. There are also religious minorities who claim the same religion as the majority but disagree with them about their sect.

Definition of Key Terms

Ethnic

Belonging to a population group or subgroup made up of people who share a common cultural background or descent.

Minority

A group of people who are different from the larger group in a country, area, etc., in some way (such as race or religion).

Nationality

A person's nationality is where they are a legal citizen, usually in the country where they were born.

Oppression

Unfair treatment that limits people's freedom.

Precarity

A state of persistent insecurity regarding employment or income.

Prejudice

Preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.

Race

One of the main groups to which people are often considered to belong is based on physical characteristics that they are perceived to share, such as skin color, eye shape, etc.

Sect

a group of people with somewhat different religious beliefs (typically regarded as heretical) from those of a larger group to which they belong. For example, Christianity is a religion, and Orthodox Christianity is a sect. Islam is a religion, and Ahmadiyya Muslims are part of one of its sects.

Segregation

The act of separating races from each other, including daily settings.

General Overview

Countless minorities have been oppressed and stripped of their most basic human rights for centuries. Arguably, the most famous of these discriminations was Apartheid in South Africa. From 1948 to 1994, South Africa was governed under a series of laws built on the grounds of segregation, separating people of different colors on a daily basis. People were divided into four groups: white, colored, Black, and Indian. First, it became illegal for South African citizens to pursue interracial relationships and marriages. Next, children were separated in schools according to their race. All public facilities, such as public transport, government-related buildings, and even restrooms and stairs, were divided for different races' use. Blacks weren't allowed to vote and were seen as reduced labor for the whites. The suffering Black minority tried to resolve this injustice within the margins of pacifism by creating political groups, but were met by armed forces, the banning of all political organizations, and imprisonment of their leaders such as Nelson Mandela. In 1994, after political prisoners were released from prison and freedom of association was established, South Africa constructed a constitutional democracy based on non-racialism with Nelson Mandela as their first president.

A more recent example would be the Uyghur Turks in China. China is accused of locking many Muslims (who are mostly Uyghur Turks) in its “re-education” camps, which are located in Xinjiang, the west of China. According to the Chinese authorities, these are places where people merely get an education and try to solve their problems, and it is said that people come to these camps voluntarily to be educated on “terrorism and religious extremism.” According to most of the Western countries, these camps are places where the Chinese government punishes people without trial and imprisons them. The tensions between the Uyghurs and the Chinese government have been there since the 20th century, but they have intensified in the last decade. The geopolitical importance of Xinjiang (neighboring the disputed Kashmir region), as well as the rivalry between the Chinese and the US governments, makes the international community turn their eyes to the area and put every action toward the people of the region (some of which are Uyghurs) into the spotlight.

In Southeast Asia, the oppression of minorities due to cultural differences has been an issue for centuries, and it is influenced by historical, social, and political factors. It is evident that most of these minority groups are forced to live in precarity due to several reasons. This has resulted (like any other group struggling with discrimination) in economic and systematic inequality. Countless minorities face challenges such as social marginalization, loss of rights over their original land, and cultural and religious restrictions other than limited access to fundamental rights such as healthcare and education. Many minority groups reside in areas that are economically disadvantaged with limited access to healthcare, education, and job opportunities. On the other hand, the minority groups who live in resource-rich regions are often exploited by private companies without fair compensation.

The Rohingya Crisis

The Rohingya are a Muslim minority who have lived in Myanmar and Bangladesh for centuries. They were never accepted as citizens, and most of them don't have any identity or documents and therefore struggle with statelessness; it is worth mentioning that they are the world's biggest stateless population. They have fled multiple waves of displacement since the 1990s and rely solely on humanitarian aid for shelter, food, water, health, and protection.

In August 2017, after widespread violence erupted in Myanmar's Rakhine state, more than 742,000 Rohingya had to flee and seek refuge in Bangladesh. During this period, human rights violations became extremely common: villages burned to the ground, various families had to separate from one another, and many deaths. Many embarked on dangerous sea voyages across the Bay of Bengal in search of safety in Bangladesh. Currently, about one million Rohingya refugees reside in Cox's Bazaar, one of the world's most densely populated refugee camp areas.

In 2023, Cyclone Mocha hit Myanmar and Bangladesh, affecting all of the population who live there and leaving the Rohingya especially vulnerable. In addition, torrential monsoon rains and overflow of various rivers have invaded several states and cities, increasing humanitarian needs and affecting around 393,000 people.

Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam

There are over fifty ethnic minorities residing in Vietnam. The regions in which most of them live lack basic infrastructure. There are so many people who are part of these minorities who don't have stable access to food, decent housing, or even restrooms. One of the biggest inequalities, though, is access to education. The majority lack education because of the long distances they need to go to attend secondary school, varying from 9 kilometers up to 70 kilometers. In addition, men are more likely to travel these distances and attend school because of cultural limitations.

Montagnards

Montagnards are the highland people who live in Vietnam. They have sought to preserve their cultural identities throughout history. They include speakers of Mon-Khmer languages and speakers of Austronesian languages. The government has started many projects for exploring natural sources such as wood from forests and mining in their territory. These initiatives often disregard the rights of these territories and result in forced displacement. The main cause of this is that the indigenous people don't have the necessary documents to prove their ownership of the areas, documents that should be given by the government. As a result, the indigenous people have unfairly reduced access to natural resources and have to leave their homes.

Blaan (Philippines)

The Philippines is home to the Blaan people, also known as the invisible people of the Philippines. They live in the Mindanao region and have long suffered due to issues caused by illegal agribusiness and illegal mining operations. For example, the Tampakan mining project (Tampakan copper-gold mine) was built directly on their land and has affected them and their local environment extremely negatively. In 2013, many anti-mining activists from the tribe were killed for resisting the construction of this mine.

Lumad (Philippines)

The Lumad People who live in the Mindanao region of the Philippines, also referred to as the invisible people of the Philippines, have suffered a massive amount of environmental injustice.

Agribusiness and illegal mining are the primary problems of the minority group, while deforestation, contamination, and flooding come along with them. The exploitation of this minority group started in the 15th century during the colonization of the Philippines by the Spanish and hasn't stopped since.

The Lumad people's original land is Mount Apo, which is home to a national park today and is considered sacred. Illegal mining severely affects this mountain negatively, stripping the Lumad of their mountain's natural sources.

Karen (Myanmar)

The Karen's history is filled with marginalization, and this has set the Karen identity to focus on resisting political domination and seeking greater autonomy over their land. In 1948, a civil war developed between various ethnic groups and the government. The Karen National Union (KNU) has since been dealing with one of the world's longest conflicts against the government of the country they reside in, driven by the desire not to be assimilated into the said country. Over the years, many Karen have fled this conflict, therefore fleeing Myanmar. Most of these refugees now reside in Thailand and often depend on humanitarian organizations for their basic needs.

In April 2024, the KNU conquered Myawaddy, a strategic town located near the border between Myanmar and Thailand, crucial for both trade and military operations. This victory took place in parallel with Operation 1027, which was initiated at the end of 2023 by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Arakan Army (AA), acting under the banner of the Three Brotherhoods Alliance. The campaign imposed significant losses and territorial defeats on the Myanmar national army, especially in the northern states of Shan and Rakhine. The KNU's conquest of Myawaddy highlighted both the group's effectiveness and relevance in Myanmar's complex conflict landscape, attracting widespread Western media coverage due to its impact on regional stability and international trade. The seizure of Myawaddy also triggered a significant response from the Thai government, which reinforced border security measures and hosted a visit by the Thai foreign minister to the nearby town of Mae Sot.

These are only some of the many minorities who live and fight for equal rights in Southeast Asia. It is worth mentioning that there are hundreds of minorities in Southeast Asia, for example, there are over 50 in Vietnam alone. Each minority group has its own struggles with the government, with the majority, and with each other. It is evidently not possible to discuss the problem of each and every one.

Non-Muslim minority groups in Indonesia

Around 87 percent of Indonesians accept Islam as their faith. The non-Muslim minority group faces challenges such as attacks on their houses of worship. From 2007 to 2019, there have been 199 attacks targeting churches and other incidents concerning Buddhist monasteries, Confucian and Hindu temples, and a Jewish synagogue. In 2020, an extremist Islamic group attacked Christians in the Sulawesi region. They burned down homes, destroyed places of worship, and murdered people.

There have also been restrictive regulations on places of worship starting from 2006. The Joint Regulation on Houses of Worship asks for ninety members of the congregation and the signatures of sixty local houses of worship approving of the new one that is asking to be built.

Similarly to non-Muslims, Muslims of different sects of Islam also face discrimination. Almost 99 percent of Muslims in Indonesia claim to be Sunni. However, they cohabit with other people from other sects of Islam, such as Ahmadiyya and Shi'a Muslims. They have long been socially pressured to convert to Sunni, and their actions about their faith have constantly been restricted. These restrictions range from bans on them trying to spread their faith to wearing anything that indicates that they are Ahmadi.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Event
April 2024	The KNU captured Myawaddy
May 2023	Cyclone Mocha hit Myanmar
August 2017	Widespread violence erupted in Myanmar
2013	The Tampakan gold-copper mine was built in the Philippines
1948-1994	Apartheid

Major Parties Involved

The Philippines

This country is made up of more than 7000 islands and is home to the Lumad, Blaan, and many other minorities, it is a country in which discrimination has been seen for centuries. Its population is around 117 million, and its capital is Manila. For over 3 centuries, the country was under Spanish colonization, which left a cultural effect on it.

Vietnam

Vietnam is a country of around 100 million people and was colonized by France. Its capital city is Hanoi. It is governed by a socialist government. It is home to Montagnards and over 50 other minorities.

Myanmar

Myanmar has a population of about 55 million people, and its capital city is Naipidau. The country is the largest by area in Mainland Southeast Asia. It is home to many minorities, such as Rhonigya and Karen, and it is somewhat threatened by the KNU.

KNU

Karen National Union (KNU) is the armed forces of the Karen who live in Myanmar.

Thailand

Thailand's population is around 72 million, and its capital city is Bangkok. It has never been colonized and has the second largest economy in ASEAN. It is home to many minorities; discrimination is encountered commonly on its territory.

Indonesia

Indonesia has a population of around 277 million, and its capital city is Jakarta. It is home to religious minorities, as 87 percent of the country identifies as Muslim and around 99 percent of the Muslims claim Sunni as their sect.

Possible Solutions

A possible (and very general) solution to this problem would be to educate non-minorities, minorities, and indigenous peoples about the rights of minorities in their respective countries. Therefore, even if the government is disregarding their rights, the general population wouldn't be blindsided about what is going on.

Another possible solution could be to celebrate some of the minority cultures at school.

Calling out bigotry speech and prejudice is another one.

In the bigger picture, the integration of minorities into the majority's culture without being assimilated and their cultures being completely lost. This could be done by joining minority groups' and majority groups' children from an early age at school.

These solutions are aimed at resolving the problems of verbal assault and bullying. The physical issues, such as minorities' loss of rights over their original land, must be resolved by the government by coming to an agreement with the majority and the minority groups.

Note from the chair:

Dear delegate,

I hope this research report helps you better understand the issue that will be discussed during the HMUN conference in April and write your clauses. I highly encourage you to take a look at the sources that I have listed below to grasp the subject more profoundly and to research other minorities in Southeast Asia (especially concerning your delegation) as so many minority groups exist in the region, and it is quite impossible to write about all of them in detail. Thank you for reading my research report, I can't wait to debate about your clauses during the conference!

Bibliography

<https://www.scribbr.com/citation/generator/>

Social identities and systems of oppression. (n.d.). National Museum of African American History and Culture. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/social-identities-and-systems-oppression>

United Nations. (2024, August 23). *Far from the Headlines: Myanmar – The Rohingya crisis*. United Nations Western Europe. <https://unric.org/en/myanmar-the-rohingya-crisis/>

Anhthh. (2020, June 30). *Ethnic minorities and indigenous people - Open Development Vietnam*. Open Development Vietnam - Sharing Information About Vietnam and Its Development With the World. <https://vietnam.opendevelopmentmekong.net/topics/ethnic-minorities-and-indigenous-people/>

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2024, October 18). *Montagnard | Highland, Vietnam, Indigenous*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Montagnard-people>

Wikipedia contributors. (2024, April 4). *Tampakan mine*. Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tampakan_mine

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2024b, December 11). *Karen | Tribe, History, Insurgency, & Facts*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Karen>

AUHRM Project Focus Area: *The Apartheid | African Union*. (n.d.).

<https://au.int/en/auhrm-project-focus-area->

[apartheid#:~:text=The%20Apartheid%201948%20to%201994,contact%20between%20the%20two%20groups](https://au.int/en/auhrm-project-focus-area-apartheid#:~:text=The%20Apartheid%201948%20to%201994,contact%20between%20the%20two%20groups)

5 Ways to Fight Hate and Discrimination. (n.d.). UNICEF USA.

<https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/5-ways-fight-hate-and-discrimination>

Sanchez, E. P. a. W. I. (2024, March 25). *The lumad, invisible people of the Philippines*. *ArcGIS StoryMaps*.

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b3bd2e353c7e4566b124bd15c008793f>

On Ahmadiyya Muslims in Indonesia

<https://www.amnesty.org/ar/wp->

[content/uploads/2021/07/asa210082011en.pdf](https://www.amnesty.org/ar/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/asa210082011en.pdf)

On religious minorities in Indonesia

<https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021%20Factsheet%20->

[%20Indonesias%20Pancasila.pdf](https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021%20Factsheet%20-%20Indonesias%20Pancasila.pdf)

